

February 21st, 2011

**Testimony of Nancy Rosen, Former Member of the Board of Directors at Kids in Crisis,
Related to Raised Bill No. 981
An Act Concerning the Placement of Young Children in Congregate Care Facilities**

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, Representative Fawcett, distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children my name is Nancy Rosen, and I have been a resident of Greenwich CT for over 20 years. I served on the Board of Directors of Kids in Crisis for six years from September 2004 through September, 2010, and also have served for several years on their Honorary Board. I am currently retired, but I had a 25+ year career as a senior hospital administrator in New York State including several years as the administrator of Pediatrics at a major academic medical center. I am writing this testimony because I am very concerned about the negative impact that Raised Bill No. 981 will have on Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens, our young children.

Unfortunately children do not have the ability to represent themselves to speak against this proposal, but I am certain after having witnessed firsthand the very positive impact placement at Kids in Crisis has had on the children at Kids in Crisis over the years and having worked with numerous physicians who care for this vulnerable population, that they would feel that the system was being totally unresponsive to the children's needs and it was denying them the medical and psycho-social services they so desperately need. I have personally witnessed the difference emergency respite care makes in the lives of children and teens in crisis. I am sure that we are all desirous of a positive long-term result for the children of Connecticut. None of us wants to see young children in congregate care. I think there must be a misunderstanding about definitions which is causing this grave potential disservice to our children.

Emergency care, like what is done at Kids in Crisis, is immediate and temporary prior to placement in a more permanent setting. Congregate care is long-term placement of children in a group setting. This proposal does not take this accurate definition into account. The reality is that many young children in crisis need an emergency placement where they can have their physical and emotional needs quickly assessed and an appropriate plan of action swiftly developed. The children can subsequently be returned home with support services or moved to a foster home or relative care. Foster homes do not have the resources or ability to provide the quality or depth of emergency assessments to identify serious medical and psycho-social conditions. Short-term emergency care, however, does have these resources.

The bill as it is designed does not meet the needs of this vulnerable population. The proposed legislation states that a child under the age of 6 or a sibling group with a child under the age of 6 can only be placed in "congregate care" if the child has severe health needs. Yet, a child's true medical and mental health condition is rarely known at the time of removal. Placing a child at an emergency shelter such as Kids in Crisis ensures that a comprehensive physical exam can be done by their onsite Nurse Practitioner within 48 hours. Other psychological and behavioral exams can take place at the same time, allowing quick placement recommendations. Ultimately, this increases the opportunity for Connecticut's children to successfully return home, to a relative or to a foster home.

Here's another major problem with the bill as proposed: It is unrealistic to expect the Commissioner can certify to the court that all attempts were made to place a child with a family before they are placed in an emergency program. Almost always, a child removed from their home is an emergency, and rarely occurs Monday through Friday during business hours. Safe Homes, like Kids in Crisis, are designed to respond to a child in crisis 24 hours a day. That's what Safe Homes are designed to do...assess kids' physical and emotional needs, stabilize their behaviors, plan for them to find a permanent home...all while keeping siblings together during a tumultuous time when they may only have each other.

If this legislation is enacted there's a strong chance that the safety and well being of children who have been removed from their homes because of neglect, abuse and hardship will be threatened. Is this really what the State of Connecticut wants to see happen to our children?

Sincerely,
Nancy Rosen